

Revisiting Just War

An evangelical biblical-theology of war

examining Oliver O'Donovan's theology of just war

Synopsis

The purpose of this paper is to examine the just-war theology of Oliver O'Donovan through the development of an evangelical biblical theology of war. Having outlined his theological position, we shall see that his conclusion is that Christians are permitted (possibly even called) to participate in just wars as an extension and participation in God's providential judgment. From our examination, we shall see three questions emerge:

Is war 'an extraordinary extension of ordinary acts of judgment' in which Christians are called by God to participate?

Does the fact that God is working providentially through war constitute a command, or license, to engage in war?

Is the governmental role of judgment 'a carefully circumscribed and specially privileged exception to a general prohibition of judgment'?

To examine these questions, we shall seek to develop an evangelical biblical theology of war, and the role of God's people in war. In the Old Testament, we shall see that war held a specific role in the history of Israel, and was intrinsically interwoven with the land and faithfulness. At the same time, the Old Testament narrative reveals God's sovereign and providential control of the nations, which means that anything that happens on the international stage is solely through the work of God. Similarly, though the wars of the conquest were an expression of God's judgment of those nations, all subsequent actions by God show that he will enact his judgment of evil nations through his sovereign control of other nations, not through Israel's actions. As a result, the Old

Testament does not call for Israel to enact God's judgment in the form of war. Instead, it displays a developing ethic of non-resistance to evil nations that is based on a profound understanding of God's sovereign and providential control.

In the New Testament, we shall see a continuation of the theology of God's providence and a faith that he will care for his people. We shall also see that the doctrine of God's impending judgment means that Christians are not to take part in the role of judgment in this age, at least not against non-Christians and not coercively. Our examination of Romans 13 will challenge the argument that the role of government provides an exception to the general pattern of non-judgment. Rather, we shall seek to demonstrate that the more likely understanding of the text in its context is that Christians are to respond to evil with good, and trust that God in his providence is judging evil. One of the mechanisms that God is using for that restraint is the civil governments. This calls for submission and obedience to those governments where they do not give commands contrary to God's pattern of living, but is not permission to participate in war.

It is not the purpose of this paper to present a fully developed argument for pacifism, nor to address arguments for just war which are not part of O'Donovan's presentation. Nor it is our purpose to conclusively examine war as a whole or the role of a Christian within the governmental role of judgment within its own borders. Rather, we shall limit ourselves to examining one particular argument for just war and considering whether it has met its burden of proof. However, the biblical theology of war that we develop will raise some possibilities for further ethical consideration that we will briefly reflect on as a coda to this paper.

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1 Introduction and Method

The purpose of this paper is to examine Oliver O'Donovan's theology of just war from an evangelical biblical-theological perspective. As such, we will focus on biblical theology and evangelical scholarship to examine whether his arguments reflect the best interpretation of the biblical narrative. This paper only engages with O'Donovan and the arguments that he puts forward. It is not a comprehensive engagement with just war theology as a whole, nor an alternative theology of pacifism. In particular, this paper does not focus on the issue of *love*, which is not part of O'Donovan's primary argument, but on *justice* and *providence*. However, this paper does present a biblical theology which raises some possibilities for Christian ethics. This paper will conclude with a brief consideration of those observations.

2 O'Donovan's Just War

2.1 War as Judgment

In *Just War Revisited* O'Donovan states that 'armed conflict can and must be re-conceived as an extraordinary extension of ordinary acts of judgment.'¹ In his previous work, *Ways of Judgment*, he argues that judgment is 'an act of moral discrimination that pronounces upon a preceding act or existing state of affairs to establish a new public context.'² It is reactive; it involves consideration of a situation that is already in existence. It is also public; the situation being considered must in some way be public,

¹ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

² Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 7.

and the act of judgment must also be public.³ Finally, it is future oriented; the act of judgment creates a new public context for the future of the community involved.⁴

This definition of judgment is very broad, and covers a wide gamut of discriminations within the public sphere, one of which is *punishment*. O'Donovan defines punishment as 'a judgement enacted on the person, property or liberty of the condemned party.'⁵ As a judgment, punishment is an *act of pronouncing* upon a wrongdoer's action, not just a way of *responding* to it. The expression of such judgment is force directed at the offender 'for the simple reason that, materially, there is nothing else to exert.'⁶ Such judgments assume due judicial process within a recognised governmental structure.⁷ However, 'when ordinary organs of judgment cannot function, extraordinary ones must be devised. This principle permits even a private citizen to exercise political authority in risking an assailant's life to save a victim's.'⁸

This concept of *extraordinary judgment* forms the foundation for O'Donovan's theology of just war. When a situation at the international level calls out for judgment, then it is not only the right of other nations, but their duty, to pronounce that judgment.⁹ As with punishment, this kind of judgment 'has only the same material means available to it as the crime.'¹⁰ When a situation involves armed conflict, then the means of judgment is also armed conflict. In *Just War Revisited*, O'Donovan continues from that point to

³ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 10.

⁴ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 9.

⁵ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 107.

⁶ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 29.

⁷ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 4–5, 10–11.

⁸ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 208.

⁹ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 6.

¹⁰ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 7.

consider the criteria for determining whether a war and actions within a war are true expressions of judgment within the circumstances. These criteria involve authority, discrimination and proportion.¹¹

2.2 Government as Judge

At its core, O'Donovan's concept of judgement is a function of politics.¹² To understand the basis of a government's authority to judge, we must understand O'Donovan's theology of government. He argues that government holds an authority and mandate from God to execute judgment, and that this mandate is limited to judgment alone. This theology comes from his detailed biblical theology of authority and politics in *Desire of the Nations*.

His starting point for a theology of authority is the reign of God,¹³ and he focuses on the history of Israel's covenant with God 'as a point of disclosure from which the nature of all political authority comes into view.'¹⁴ O'Donovan argues that God mediates his authority through human functions and institutions.¹⁵ He then proceeds to examine the OT narrative and highlights three prominent themes identified with the rule of God and expressed in Israel: Salvation (ישועה), judgement (שפט, צדק) and possession (נחלה).¹⁶

¹¹ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 14.

¹² O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 32.

¹³ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19.

¹⁴ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 45.

¹⁵ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 49.

¹⁶ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 36–45, 49–64.

He concludes that these themes cover what it means for God's authority to be mediated in Israel.¹⁷

When O'Donovan moves into the New Testament, he rightly finds the locus of God's reign in Christ.¹⁸ In a detailed treatment, he demonstrates that Jesus is the fulfilment of the three paradigmatic themes of authority.¹⁹ In Christ, salvation has been won once and for all, and the possession is Christ himself.²⁰ Judgment, on the other hand, has only provisionally been revealed, and will be finally revealed on the last day.²¹ In the meantime, Christ rules this world, and he mediates his authority through his providential rule. This rule is split in two;²² the primary expression of Christ's rule is his people – the Church – which 'represents God's kingdom by living under its rule, and by welcoming the world under its rule.'²³ As the church invites people into the Kingdom, they participate in the salvation and possession that Jesus has provided, and look forward to the final judgment.²⁴ However, Christ's continued providential rule is also represented in the governments of the nations.²⁵ This is a temporary rule: 'they are not agents of Christ, but are marked for displacement when the rule of God in Christ is finally disclosed.'²⁶

¹⁷ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 45–6.

¹⁸ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 89.

¹⁹ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 93–113.

²⁰ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 148.

²¹ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 146.

²² O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 146, 234.

²³ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 174.

²⁴ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 176 ff.

²⁵ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 46.

²⁶ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 211–2.

So the question becomes: ‘Given that God has overcome the principalities and powers by his death and resurrection, what rights can they still claim?’²⁷ To answer that, O’Donovan turns to Romans 13:1-7.²⁸ Reading this passage as a manifesto for governmental activity, he concludes: ‘St Paul’s new assertion is that the performance of judgement alone justifies government; and this reflects his new Christian understanding of the political situation.’²⁹ Referencing his three paradigmatic themes, O’Donovan argues that ‘secular authorities are no longer in the fullest sense mediators of the rule of God. They mediate his judgements only. The power that they exercise in defeating their enemies, the national possessions they safeguard, these are now rendered irrelevant by Christ’s triumph.’³⁰ But even the judgment that governments execute is provisional, because we are now awaiting the revelation of Christ’s judgment on the final day.³¹

2.3 The Christian and War

O’Donovan sees Christ’s rule as split between the church and state; while the only role left to the state is judgment, the church is ‘a community that “judges not”’.³² He continues: ‘The secular function in society was to witness to divine judgement by, as it were, holding the stage for it; the church, on the other hand, must witness to divine judgement by no judgement, avoiding litigation and swallowing conflict in forgiveness.’³³ ‘By embracing the final judgement of God Christians have accepted that they have no

²⁷ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 147.

²⁸ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 147–9.

²⁹ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 148.

³⁰ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 151.

³¹ O’Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 32. 28

³² O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 218.

³³ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 259.

need for penultimate judgements to defend their rights.³⁴ At first glance, this framework would seem to preclude a Christian from engaging in the role of war or judgment.

However, O'Donovan makes an exception: 'the sphere of public judgment constitutes a carefully circumscribed and specially privileged exception to a general prohibition of judgment.'³⁵ Thus, he paints two contexts in which Christian faithfulness appears quite different: 'Staged against the supportive backdrop of the community of belief and worship, it takes a pastoral shape as mutual forgiveness, by which enemies who believe the Gospel are made enemies no longer. But it must also be staged missiologically against a backdrop of unbelief and disobedience, and here it assumes the secular form of judgment – not final judgment, but judgment as the interim provision of God's common grace, promising the dawning of God's final peace'.³⁶

Even as he says this, O'Donovan recognises the conflict: 'As we take the responsibility of judging upon ourselves, we set ourselves at a distance from the evangelical disposition of obedience and acceptance [...] To step across into the role of judge is to leave the position of evangelical strength and to enter the sphere of human weakness and political shame. [...] Its way of confronting sin is not the evangelical way of patient suffering. Its way of hearing God's judgement is not the evangelical way of humble and trusting obedience.'³⁷

³⁴ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 151.

³⁵ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 32. 99

³⁶ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 6.

³⁷ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 86–87.

2.4 Providence

What is it about the sphere of public judgment that allows a Christian to bypass the ‘general prohibition of judgment’,³⁸ and ‘set ourselves at a distance from the evangelical disposition of obedience and acceptance’?³⁹ From Romans 13 and his biblical theology, O’Donovan develops a theology of the state as an expression of God’s providence.⁴⁰ O’Donovan never provides a working definition of providence, but he uses the term to encapsulate God sustaining his creation and working in the events of history for its good.⁴¹ For consistency in this paper, we will continue with that definition.

In his construction, God’s sovereign control of the world means that a government’s holding of authority ‘is a work of divine providence in history’.⁴² However, holding power does not automatically impose legitimacy, rather: ‘The appropriate unifying element in natural order is law rather than government.’⁴³ Thus: ‘The authority of a human regime mediates divine authority in a unitary structure, but is subject to the authority of law within the community, which bears independent witness to the divine command.’⁴⁴ That is, God’s providential authority is revealed in governments acting through the rule of law.

Importantly, O’Donovan pictures the Christian as participating in God’s providential actions. In one argument, he describes war-as-judgment as ‘a provisional witness to

³⁸ O’Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 99.

³⁹ O’Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 86.

⁴⁰ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 147–9.

⁴¹ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 32, 72. O’Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 53.

⁴² O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 46.

⁴³ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 72.

⁴⁴ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 65.

the unity of God's rule in the face of the antagonistic praxis'.⁴⁵ He adds: 'God's mercy and peace may and must be witnessed to in this interim of salvation-history through a praxis of judgment'.⁴⁶ Engaging in such a war 'is an expression of faith [...] in the providential gift of honest judgment as a praxis in which the whole political community can be involved.'⁴⁷ For O'Donovan, where God is working providentially, his people must *witness* to it by *participating* along-side. Such participation includes the enactment of judgment against the evil-doer, including just war.

2.5 Questioning O'Donovan

Three major questions arise from O'Donovan's argument, and these are the questions that this paper will consider:

Is war 'an extraordinary extension of ordinary acts of judgment' in which Christians are called by God to participate?⁴⁸

Does the fact that God is working providentially through war constitute a command, or license, to engage in war?

Is the governmental role of judgment 'a carefully circumscribed and specially privileged exception to a general prohibition of judgment'?⁴⁹

⁴⁵ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 7.

⁴⁶ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 9.

⁴⁷ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 16.

⁴⁸ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 6.

⁴⁹ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 99.

There are many other arguments surrounding just war, and it is not the purpose of this paper to address them all. Instead, we shall limit ourselves to examining these three questions in the light of an evangelical biblical theology. There are also a number of valid questions that can be raised about O'Donovan's definition of judgment and his argument in general.⁵⁰ However, for the sake of this paper, we will accept his definition and his argument of how Jesus has delegated authority to church and state. The question at hand is how the role of the state interacts with the role of the individual Christian in the realm of judgment and war.

O'Donovan's ethical method is fundamentally biblical-theological.⁵¹ He argues that, when considering any specific ethical question, a biblical theology of that issue needs to be told.⁵² He demonstrates this methodology in his consideration of authority and judgment. However, when he turns to war, he does not re-examine the biblical story.⁵³ Rather, he develops his theology of war out of his established conclusions about *judgment*.⁵⁴ Therefore, to examine O'Donovan's thesis, we shall first develop a biblical theology of war and examine the role that it fills in the narrative of salvation. In regard to O'Donovan's theological arguments, we will take particular note of the interaction between war and the doctrines of providence and God's judgment. In particular response to our second question above, we shall consider Romans 13 in detail and ask

⁵⁰ For example, see the arguments in Craig Bartholomew et al., eds., *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically* (vol. 3; Scripture & Hermeneutics; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

⁵¹ Andrew J. B. Cameron, 'The Politics of Peace: Two Political Theologies', *Kategoria* 20 (2001): 26.

⁵² Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), xvii.

⁵³ Nigel Biggar, 'The Just War Revisited', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19/2 (October 2006): 224.

⁵⁴ See O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, Ch 1.

whether O'Donovan's interpretation is the best interpretation of the passage within its textual and biblical context.

In conclusion, this paper will suggest: (1) The biblical theology of war does not support O'Donovan's thesis that war is a valid extension of human judgment, rather it is the exclusive domain of God. (2) That participation in God's providential judgment of the nations does not mean engaging in war, but instead means prayer and proclamation of the Word. (3) O'Donovan's reading of Romans is not convincing enough to undergird his argument that participating in the state's role is an exception to the 'general prohibition of judgment' for Christians.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 99.

3 War in the Old Testament

On the face of it, it would seem that the existence of wars in the Old Testament – in particular wars that God has commanded and approved of – would provide theological support for just war.⁵⁶ However, as we examine the narrative of the Old Testament in this section, we shall demonstrate that:

Firstly, the wars of the Conquest were a specific event in God's salvation plan, and were specifically limited to taking possession of the Promised Land.

Secondly, these wars – and all wars involving Israel – were a function of Israel's faithfulness; when they were faithful, they won, and when they were unfaithful, they were defeated.

Thirdly, these wars were an out-working of God's providential sovereignty; God has complete control over all the nations, and Israel's victories (and losses) came only from his direct action.

Finally, while the leaders of Israel were delegated the responsibility of representing God's judgement within their own community, the role of judging other nations and those outside of Israel lay solely upon God. In the wars of the Conquest, God commanded Israel to act as his agents, but that was a direct divine command specifically limited to a single circumstance.

⁵⁶ Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 21–32. T. R. Hobbs, *A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament* (Old Testament Studies; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 14–15.

As a result of these truths, we will see that the Old Testament narrative describes war, as Longman puts it, as ‘God’s “strange” work (Is. 28:21) in which he judges evil.’⁵⁷

There is no justification given, either explicitly nor implicitly, for Israel to take part in that work unless they are given a clear prophetic command. While there is no clear command to avoid war, the narrative demonstrates a developing pattern of trusting God’s sovereignty, and leaving the care of the nations to him.

3.1 The Patriarchs

In the book of Genesis, we see clear demonstrations of God’s sovereign power over the world that he created, even while humanity descends into evil. We also see the first expressions of that providential power in his judging of human evil through direct intervention. Finally, Genesis introduces the idea that God can and will enact his providential rule through the evil actions of people.

There is no consideration of war in the creation accounts, except for the fact that they are not there. Wenham notes the polemical nature of Genesis 1 against contemporary creation epics that involve battles.⁵⁸ In this context, it is notable that it is God’s powerful word that brings order out of the chaos, not combat.⁵⁹ While the narrative of the fall contains much violence, there is no reference to warfare as such.⁶⁰ However,

⁵⁷ Tremper Longman III, ‘Warfare’, in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Leicester, England: IVP, 2000), 839.

⁵⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1987), xlvii–li. C.f. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26* (The New American Commentary; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 90–95.

⁵⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 36–7. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 93–4, 132–4.

⁶⁰ Longman, ‘Warfare’, 835. Daniel. G. Reid, ‘Violence’, in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Leicester, England: IVP, 2000), 832.

throughout those accounts, God demonstrated his ability and willingness to directly judge the evil of humanity – both individually and collectively – without the mediation of human agency.⁶¹

The first reference to war (מִלְחָמָה) occurs not long after the call of Abram.⁶² A war brews between a number of kings in the area, and in the process Lot is taken captive. In response, Abram gathers 318 men, attacks Lot's captors, and rescues all the captives.⁶³ This is the point that the mysterious Melchizedek appears; he blesses Abram, and declares that God had given him victory.⁶⁴ This blessing shows us the beginning of a theology that God can and will act for the good of his people on the international stage.⁶⁵ While there is no mention of the size of the alliance's army, it is a war between cities of a much larger scale than Abram's 318 men.⁶⁶ As Wenham notes, the primary message of this event is that God was protecting his people against extraordinary odds.⁶⁷

God's sovereign power over nations was also revealed in his covenantal promises made to Abraham in Genesis 15.⁶⁸ These promises were fundamentally political – they

⁶¹ Gen 3:8-19; 4:9-12; 6:12-17; 11:6-9. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 52.

⁶² Gen 14:1-16. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 304. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 399, 404 ff.

⁶³ Gen 14:14-16.

⁶⁴ Gen 14:19-20.

⁶⁵ Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 399. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (The New American Commentary; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 150, 157.

⁶⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 321.

⁶⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 321.

⁶⁸ Gen 15:7-21. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 434–8.

involved the movements of nations and peoples and the inhabitation of land.⁶⁹ They also show God's ability to direct events 400 years into the future.

In the account of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18-19), we see the second great example of God's ability and willingness to execute judgement on nations through direct action.⁷⁰ Abraham's experiences with Pharaoh and Abimelech show a different form of God's sovereignty.⁷¹ Both times, Abraham seeks to protect himself through portraying Sarah as his sister. Both times, God shows his ability to protect his chosen people without the need for Abraham's deception.

Finally, the Joseph cycle shows God fulfilling his promises of Genesis 15. At times God worked through the actions of individuals, at other times he intervened supernaturally. A critical moment in our understanding of God's sovereignty occurs in Genesis 50, where Joseph tells his brothers: 'You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result – the survival of many people'.⁷² Through the actions of individuals – some faithful, some incredibly unfaithful, and some outright evil – and through the actions of rulers and nations, God showed his sovereign power over his world to effect his plans.

⁶⁹ Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1980), 36–7.

⁷⁰ 18:20-21; 19:24-26. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), 64–5.

⁷¹ Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-7. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 380, 385–6. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 58–59.

⁷² Gen 50:20. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 490.

3.2 The Exodus

The book of Exodus continues this emphasis on God's sovereignty. It also considers in much more detail how God's people are to respond faithfully to this sovereignty. While God was acting for Israel's good, their responsibility was not to participate in every aspect of his actions, but to accept his salvation, and worship and obey him. Israel's failure in the Exodus was a failure to trust God's care. This led to attempts to respond to him in ways that were contrary to his commands.

When enslaved Israel finally cried out to God, he rescued them. While God declared that this would be his act of judgment, he made it clear to Moses that the saving action would be God's, and God's alone.⁷³ Moses' job was to simply stand before Pharaoh and declare 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says'.⁷⁴ Even the words were to be given to him, and when Pharaoh refused, each miraculous plague was dictated specifically by God.⁷⁵ Even the fact that Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to release the Israelites was due to God's plan.⁷⁶ At every point of this conflict between Moses and Pharaoh, God was showing his sovereign power over the greatest nation on earth. Israel's role in this was entirely passive: As they fled Egypt, God opened the Red Sea for them to pass through.⁷⁷ God defeated Pharaoh's army by first inciting him to pursue the Israelites, and then by bringing the waters of the sea down upon his

⁷³ E.g., Ex 3:19-20; 7:3-4 Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* (The New American Commentary; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 116-18, 126. Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991), 71-3.

⁷⁴ Ex 5:1.

⁷⁵ E.g., Ex 7:2, 9, 19. John I Durham, *Exodus* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1987), 99.

⁷⁶ Ex 4:21; 7:3, 13, 22; 8:19; 9:12, 35; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 17. Stuart, *Exodus*, 146-150.

⁷⁷ Ex 14.

army.⁷⁸ The appropriate response is encapsulated in Moses' command to the Israelites: 'The LORD will fight for you; you must be quiet.'⁷⁹

The Exodus is the formative event of the nation of Israel and their relationship with God.⁸⁰ When God gave the law to Israel, he identified himself as 'the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery'.⁸¹ The concept of *exodus* is one of the strongest themes throughout the Old Testament; recapitulated in the themes of exile and restoration, and further into the New Testament.⁸² The foundation of this concept is that God acts powerfully to achieve his purposes. His people are powerless, and are simply called to obey and trust him.

The rest of the Pentateuch is about Israel's response to God's saving acts – the response they should have, as opposed to the response that they do have. The Law was given to teach Israel how they were to respond to the fact that God had chosen them and saved them.⁸³ The primary act is God's; the role of Israel is to respond to that act in obedience and worship. Unfortunately, Israel fails. The creation of the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai is the most obvious example of this failure.⁸⁴ It is possible that the people were actually trying to make an image of God, and not forge an alternative.⁸⁵ If this was the case, then the people's initial sin was trying to worship God *in ways that*

⁷⁸ Ex 14:4, 26-28. Durham, *Exodus*, 187, 193.

⁷⁹ Ex 14:14. Stuart, *Exodus*, 336–7.

⁸⁰ R. E. Watts, 'Exodus', in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Leicester, England: IVP, 2000), 478–9.

⁸¹ Ex 20:2.

⁸² Watts, 'Exodus', 482 ff.

⁸³ Ex 20:2. Durham, *Exodus*, 284. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 23–24.

⁸⁴ Ex 32:1-6. Durham, *Exodus*, 418, 422.

⁸⁵ For a discussion, see William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40* (vol. 2; The Anchor Bible; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006), 551–2.

*he had not laid down.*⁸⁶ Whether or not this is what is happening in Exodus 32, it is what happens in Leviticus when Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offer unauthorised fire before God, and are struck down by him.⁸⁷ In these incidents, God rejects Israel's attempts to respond to his providential salvation in ways other than those which he lays out.

The narrative of the Exodus, and the giving of the Law, paints a clear picture of God's complete, providential, rule over the nations. This is exercised in particular in his gracious salvation of an undeserving Israel. He did this for his own glory and out of his love for them. Within this context, Israel was to participate in God's work, but only on the terms that he had laid down. There was no room for God's people to innovate in finding new ways to advance God's purposes.

3.3 War and the Law

As Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land, God commanded them to drive out and to slaughter the people who already inhabited the land.⁸⁸ This was the beginning of a holy war that continued almost until the Exile. However, the book of Deuteronomy raises three critical points that suggest that this command was limited to a specific time and place, and does not constitute grounds for a modern theology of just war:

⁸⁶ Stuart, *Exodus*, 665.

⁸⁷ Lev 10:1-3. Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2007), 179.

⁸⁸ Deut 7:1-4; 20:16-17. C.f. Ex 34:11-16. J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary; Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002), 152 ff.

Firstly, the command was targeted only against the original inhabitants of the land. Deuteronomy 2 lists a number of nations whom Israel was *not* to fight. The reason for this is that they lived outside the land promised to Israel.⁸⁹ In the same way, Deuteronomy 20 commanded that the nations who were far away were to be offered treaties, while those who inhabited the land were to be completely destroyed.⁹⁰ This suggests that the wars of the Conquest were, primarily, a function of the possession of the land.

Secondly, the specific reason given for the slaughter of the original inhabitants was ‘because they will turn your sons away from Me to worship other gods’,⁹¹ and ‘because of their wickedness’.⁹² This, however, was not a command to kill anyone who was wicked, or worshipped other Gods, since we have seen that the wars were limited to the inhabitants of the land. Rather, it was specifically intended to remove idolatry from the Promised Land, and prevent Israel from falling into unfaithfulness.⁹³ The interconnection between the land and faithfulness is demonstrated in the many passages that call for faithfulness as a response to God’s gift of the land.⁹⁴ This connection comes to a crescendo in chapter 28, where Moses delivers a final warning of obedience. If Israel stays faithful, then they will be blessed and will be victorious

⁸⁹ Deut 2:4-21. Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9* (2nd ed.; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 2001), 43.

⁹⁰ Deut 20:15-18. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 321.

⁹¹ Deut 7:4. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 177–9.

⁹² Deut 9:4. C.f. Gen 15:16; Lev 18:24–27. Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 56 ff.

⁹³ Mark E. Biddle, *Deuteronomy* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 61–64.

⁹⁴ E.g. Deut 4:21-31, 38-40; 5:6, 15, 16, 33; 6:10-12; 8:7-11; 11:8-17 etc. C.f. J. Gordon McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 11 ff.

against their enemies.⁹⁵ However, if they failed to obey, then God would bring nations to attack them.⁹⁶ Finally, if they continue to reject God, then he would bring a nation to take them into exile.⁹⁷ The ultimate punishment for unfaithfulness was *losing the land*.

Thirdly, the wars of the Conquest were to be fought by God. Many times, Moses makes the point that God would win Israel's battles for them, and drive out their enemies ahead of them.⁹⁸ However, this promise was limited to battles that God directly commanded. This is demonstrated by Israel's attempt to attack the Amalekites, despite God's command not to, which ended in a disastrous loss.⁹⁹ This incident highlights the limited role of war – Israel must only fight when it is in fulfilment of God's plan for them. There is no space for innovation or for starting wars that God had not directly commanded.

In the theology of Deuteronomy, God's command to wage war was not a licence to fight wars in general. Rather, it held a specific and limited function in the possession of the Promised Land. The land holds a unique and vital place within salvation history, and the possession of the land was dependent on Israel's faithfulness. In the same way, success in the wars of conquest depended solely on God's miraculous intervention, which was dependent on Israel's faithfulness.

⁹⁵ Deut 28:7. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 336–7.

⁹⁶ Deut 28:25-26. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 343.

⁹⁷ Deut 28:36-37, 41, 48-57, 64-65. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 346–350.

⁹⁸ E.g. Deut 4:37-38; 7:1-2; 9:1-3; 12:29; 18:11; 19:1; 20:1; 31:1-3. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, cix–cxii.

⁹⁹ Deut 1:41-46. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 34–5.

3.3.1 Judgment

One of the great strengths of O'Donovan's *Desire of the Nations* is his demonstration of the role of judgment in Israel.¹⁰⁰ Clearly, when God gave laws to Israel, and systems for adjudicating the breaking of these laws, he was delegating the role of judgment to them.¹⁰¹ However, these laws only covered life within the borders of the nation; there were no laws of international behaviour, nor any instructions to enforce a level of law upon their neighbours.

When commanding the wars of the conquest, God declared that it was an enactment of his judgment against the original inhabitants.¹⁰² In Genesis, God states that he is waiting until he judges the Amorites.¹⁰³ In Leviticus 18, he describes the conquest as a punishment.¹⁰⁴ In Deuteronomy 9, it is because of the wickedness of the inhabitants.¹⁰⁵ However, again, this is not a licence to enact God's justice wherever Israel chose. Rather, it was a specific command from God for a specific situation. There is nothing in God's commands regarding the conquest to suggest a wider mandate for war-as-judgment. Rather, Deuteronomy 32 depicts God alone as the one wielding the sword of judgment against the nations.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, in his warnings to Israel about the punishment

¹⁰⁰ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 30–81. C.f. 37–41.

¹⁰¹ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 56–61.

¹⁰² Craigie, *Problem of War*, 174. Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 156 ff.

¹⁰³ Gen. 15:16. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 174–5.

¹⁰⁴ Lev 18:24–27. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1992), 298.

¹⁰⁵ Deut 9:4–5. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 182–3.

¹⁰⁶ Deut 32:41. Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 819–21. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 459.

for continued disobedience, God reveals his willingness to use other nations to enact his judgment, even if it was against his own people.¹⁰⁷

3.4 War in Practice

Where Deuteronomy laid out the theology behind the wars of conquest, the history of Israel demonstrates that theology in practice.¹⁰⁸ The Deuteronomic History and Chronicles detail Israel's history with war while providing much theological commentary. A major problem with understanding this theology is the vast number of individual battles recounted in these books, and the various narrative comments made about them. To facilitate a systematic analysis, section 3.9 of this paper contains a table detailing every battle that occurred in Israel's history. In particular, this table specifies the enemy fought (whether or not they were 'natives' of the Palestine region), the result, and any involvement by God that is specified in the text. This table clarifies much about the battles waged by Israel, and allows us to see that the Deuteronomic themes regarding war are reinforced in Israel's history:

Firstly, Israel's victories came from God, not their military power. Almost every victory came with a prophetic or direct command from God to attack, tactical direction from

¹⁰⁷ E.g. Deut 28:15-68; 29:18-29. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 405–410.

¹⁰⁸ Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (2nd ed.; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series; Sheffield: JSOT), 28 ff.

God, clear divine intervention such as a miracle, or a direct claim that God gave the victory.¹⁰⁹ Most of the exceptions are one-line descriptions, or lists of victories.

Secondly, the vast majority of battles that Israel or Judah won were against one of the original inhabitants of the land. Out of 43 victories, two were against forces from outside the Promised Land; one battle against Cush, and the siege of Jerusalem by Assyria.¹¹⁰ In both cases, Israel was invaded and God defeated the enemy *without a battle*. Any other time Israel or Judah engaged in a battle outside of the Promised Land, they lost.

Thirdly, battles that were lost were attributed to a corresponding unfaithfulness of the people.¹¹¹ This is true both of the losses that they faced at the hands of the original inhabitants of the land (e.g. the Judges cycles) and those against external forces (e.g. Egypt, Assyria and Babylon). These losses are an expression of God's judgment against Israel.¹¹²

The book of Joshua provides a microcosm of these observations. Beginning with the conquest of Jericho, God won the battles through miraculous events.¹¹³ However, even then, unfaithfulness resulted in lost battles, such as when Achan kept some of the

¹⁰⁹ Craigie, *Problem of War*, 174. Tremper Longman III and Daniel. G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 41–4.

¹¹⁰ 2 Chr 14:10-14; 2 Kings 18-19.

¹¹¹ Craigie, *Problem of War*, 77–78.

¹¹² Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 60.

¹¹³ E.g. Josh 6:20; Josh 10:10-13. Trent C. Butler, *Joshua* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1984), 72, 115–6.

treasure that was committed to destruction.¹¹⁴ After chapter 11, there are no accounts of war. Instead, the rest of the book is taken up by detailing the division of the land and warnings and exhortations to stay faithful to God. As Reid concludes: 'The land in Joshua, symbolizes "rest" from warfare'.¹¹⁵

In the book of Judges, we see the fulfilment of the Deuteronomic promise that God would use the surrounding nations to achieve his good purposes in disciplining his people.¹¹⁶ This is the inverse of the themes that we have seen in Joshua: God gave Israel victory with the warning to be faithful. When they were unfaithful, he gave them defeat until they returned to him.¹¹⁷ Through all this, God's sovereign power was demonstrated in his ability to raise up enemies and defeat them whenever he chose. The repetitive pattern of Israel's sin demonstrated that these victories and losses had nothing to do with the nature of the enemy, nor with Israel's military power. They were solely a function of God's judgment of Israel's faithfulness, or lack thereof, in worshipping him.¹¹⁸

Throughout the history of Israel and Judah, the same themes resurface over and again. As the table in section 3.9 details, when the people were faithful, God gave them victory through his sovereign power. When they were not, he exercised his control over the nations to judge his people. These themes continue into the Books of Samuel,

¹¹⁴ Josh 7:1-12. Butler, *Joshua*, 87–88.

¹¹⁵ Reid, 'Violence', 833. C.f. Josh. 1:13, 15; 11:23; 14:15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1.

¹¹⁶ Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (The New American Commentary; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 136–141, 147.

¹¹⁷ E.g. Judg 2:11-19. Barnabas Lindars, *Judges 1-5* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 98–101. Berit Olam, *Judges* (Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 30–2.

¹¹⁸ Olam, *Judges*, 30–2.

beginning with the (slightly farcical) account of the loss of the Ark and God's recovery of it.¹¹⁹ After his coronation, Saul was filled with the Spirit of God, and continued to prosecute the war against the original inhabitants of the land.¹²⁰ His personal faithlessness not only resulted in his loss of the crown,¹²¹ but when Israel next lined up against the Philistines, they were facing defeat at the hands of Goliath.¹²² However, God saved them from defeat under their faithless king, through the faithfulness of their future king.¹²³ David's defeat of Goliath is an iconic demonstration of God's ability to protect his people against any odds.¹²⁴ Throughout his ascendancy over Saul, and his reign, David was victorious against all the surrounding nations who attacked him.¹²⁵ However, David's own unfaithfulness led to God's judgment on him, resulting in civil wars.¹²⁶

3.5 The Temple and Peace

The clearest demonstration of the relationship between the land and war occurs in the building of the Temple. The Temple was a statement of the permanency of God's (and hence Israel's) inhabitation of the land.¹²⁷ As such, it was a physical expression of the

¹¹⁹ 1 Sam 4-6. David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 88–90. Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1983), 40–45.

¹²⁰ 1 Sam 11:6, 11. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 109.

¹²¹ 1 Sam 13:8-15; 15:26-29. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 157, 177–8. David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 330.

¹²² 1 Sam 17:1-11. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 195–6.

¹²³ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 182–3.

¹²⁴ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 182–3. Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 434–5.

¹²⁵ 2 Sam 8; 10; A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (Word Biblical Theology; Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 134, 155–6. Walter Brueggeman, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 263–4, Online: 1 & 2 Samuel.

¹²⁶ 2 Sam 12:7-12. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 431–31.

¹²⁷ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1981), 114.

end point of the Exodus and the wars of conquest.¹²⁸ The Chronicler clearly links the end for the Exodus with the end of war. When God rejected David's offer to build a Temple, he explains that it was because David had 'shed much blood and waged great wars.' Instead, Solomon would be 'a man of rest'. He would build the Temple and God would 'give him rest from all his surrounding enemies'.¹²⁹ This close connection between peace and the Temple strongly suggests that the wars that Israel fought were a function of the conquest of the land, and were intended to cease once the land was held.¹³⁰ This is further reflected in the fact that Solomon's early reign is unmarred by any form of war. Instead, the descriptions of his wisdom, wealth, and his respect in the international community show that God was blessing Israel through peace and trade.

At the centre of this account – the dedication of the Temple – Solomon prayed a prayer showing his trust in God as the controller of the whole world.¹³¹ God's response to that prayer included a warning that his blessing was conditional on continued faithfulness.¹³² Unfortunately, it was not long before Solomon disobeyed him in spectacular ways, and God declared his judgement. Only at this point is Israel again threatened by enemies, and we read the accounts of men whom God was raising to harry Israel.¹³³

¹²⁸ 1 Kings 6:1. Simon J. Devries, *1 Kings* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 93, 96–8. Walter Brueggeman, *1 & 2 Kings* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 83–4.

¹²⁹ 1 Chr 22:7–10. Ralph W. Klein, *1 Chronicles* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 435–7.

¹³⁰ A similar point is made by Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 140–1.

¹³¹ 1 Kings 8. This strong monotheism has led many documentary hypotheses to claim that the theology of this prayer reflects a much later period of history, so it must have been inserted by a later redactor. Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings* (The Anchor Bible; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 292–3.

¹³² 1 Kings 9:6–7. Devries, *1 Kings*, 127–8.

¹³³ 1 Kings 11. Devries, *1 Kings*, 143–4, 151.

3.6 Isaiah

The history books supply the details of the wars in the second half of Israel's history. We can see these wars detailed in section 3.9 of this paper, and discussed in broad terms in the section above. However, it is the writing prophets who give the most detailed theological reflection of the times. In this section, we shall primarily consider Isaiah, as a prophet who spans much of that time. There is much debate about dating Isaiah, and splitting up the book into two or three sections. While Barry Webb's argument for the unity of the book is quite convincing,¹³⁴ other scholars consider it to be three books spanning up to 4 centuries.¹³⁵ At the very least, the themes of Isaiah span the history of Israel from the fall of Samaria to the return from Exile.

In Isaiah, we see the themes of God's providence and his judgement coming together on the international stage. In this book, God clearly states that he is executing his judgment on Israel, and on other nations, through the evil actions of other nations. This does not make the aggressor nations good, rather God uses their evil to achieve his good purposes. The book also shows this control of the nations in his protection of Israel, and shows that the correct response to God's providence is trust and faithful obedience.

¹³⁴ Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England: IVP, 1996), 33–7.

¹³⁵ Patricia K. Tull, *Isaiah 1-39* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2010), 11–19.

John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1985), xxvi ff.

One of the most dominant themes of Isaiah 1-38 (Proto-Isaiah) is God's judgement on an unfaithful Israel.¹³⁶ Israel's sin had reached the point that God was fulfilling his Deuteronomic threat and was bringing Assyria to remove them from the land.¹³⁷ Again, this reveals God's sovereign control over the greatest empire of the day.

God also demonstrates this control in his judgment of other nations; there are extended oracles of judgement against other nations, which God is executing, in part, through Assyria.¹³⁸ In this, God is showing that he is capable of using one evil nation to punish another, outside of any involvement from his people. This is a continuation of the pattern revealed in the Joseph Cycle; that God is capable of using humanity's evil actions for his good purposes. This theme is present in many other prophets.¹³⁹ Indeed, Habakkuk struggles with how God can use these evil forces to ravage his own people, and still remain holy.¹⁴⁰ While he receives no answer, Habakkuk concludes that God's providential control of the nations is a source of strength.¹⁴¹ In Chapter 28, Isaiah echoes Habakkuk's concerns, calling God's judging wars 'his strange work' and 'his disturbing task.'¹⁴²

It is important to note in Isaiah that the evil nations are not made good through God's use of them. That is, the fact that God used Assyria to enact his good justice did not

¹³⁶ Allan Harman, *Isaiah* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 24. Alec J. Motyer, *Isaiah* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Nottingham, England: IVP, 1999), 17–18.

¹³⁷ E.g. Isa 10:5-19. Tull, *Isaiah 1-39*, 213–5.

¹³⁸ Isa 7:20; 8:4-7; 15-24.

¹³⁹ E.g. Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 363–4. Douglas K. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1987), 171–3.

¹⁴⁰ F. F. Bruce, 'Habakkuk', in *The Minor Prophets* (ed. Thomas E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 834–5.

¹⁴¹ Hab 3:17-19. Bruce, 'Habakkuk', 893–4.

¹⁴² Isa 28:21. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 371.

make their actions in invading Israel good in any way. At the same time that Isaiah calls Assyria the 'rod of God's anger', he declares God's wrath against them for their arrogance.¹⁴³ This cycle is repeated for Babylon in chapters 39-55 (Deutero-Isaiah); God declares that faithless Judah is to be destroyed by the Babylonians in chapter 39, yet in chapter 47 he declares judgement on Babylon for how they treated his people.¹⁴⁴ This pattern is not unique to Isaiah. Jeremiah declares Nebuchadnezzar to be God's servant for judgment, and then immediately declares judgment on him and on Babylon for his deeds in the conquest.¹⁴⁵ The fact that God used these nations for his justice was not approval for their actions.¹⁴⁶ Habakkuk shows us that, even as God summoned Babylon to do his work, he knew what they were going to do, and he knew that he was going to judge them for it.¹⁴⁷ As Webb concludes: 'The twin truths of divine sovereignty and human responsibility are held together in a fine tension here, as they are in Scripture as a whole.'¹⁴⁸

God's sovereign power over the nations is not just exercised in judgement, but also in his protection of his people. This is shown most clearly in the account of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem.¹⁴⁹ In Webb's structure, this account is the centre of the book,¹⁵⁰ in

¹⁴³ Isa 10:5-12. Tull, *Isaiah 1-39*, 213-5. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 150-1.

¹⁴⁴ Isa 39:5-7; 47:1-11. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 246. John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1987), 171.

¹⁴⁵ Jer 25:9, 12-14. Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly, and Joel F. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 368.

¹⁴⁶ See discussion in Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 363-4.

¹⁴⁷ Hab 1. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1984), 94-96, 102.

¹⁴⁸ Webb, *Isaiah*, 72.

¹⁴⁹ Isa 36-37.

¹⁵⁰ Webb, *Isaiah*, 35-6.

a three-Isaiah framework, it is the hinge between Proto- and Deutero-Isaiah.¹⁵¹ Either way, it holds a pivotal position and demonstrates a right response to God's providence.¹⁵² While Israel was being destroyed for unfaithfulness, Hezekiah's faith is shown in his prayer and obedience, and God saves Jerusalem through a direct miracle.¹⁵³ This is further emphasised in chapter 45 when we see God raising Cyrus, not just to punish Babylon, but to restore Israel.¹⁵⁴ Clearly, God is directing the entire world according to his plan. The message is that he will protect his people, or let them be defeated, solely by his power and according to his good purposes.

While the siege of Jerusalem highlights God's sovereignty, it also highlights Hezekiah's response; he prays, trusts God's provision and waits for salvation.¹⁵⁵ This is not simply Hezekiah realising he is heavily outnumbered and has no other choice than to pray. Rather he is recognising that the battle would be won or lost by God alone, not by military strength.¹⁵⁶ In chapter 31, Isaiah reinforces this position by condemning those who looked to military strength and alliances for their national security: 'They trust in the number of chariots and in the great strength of charioteers. They do not look to the Holy One of Israel and they do not seek the LORD's help.'¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (The Anchor Bible; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 89–92.

¹⁵² Tull, *Isaiah 1-39*, 533–35. Webb, *Isaiah*, 150–53.

¹⁵³ Isa 37:14-20, 33-37. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 652, 668–71. Tull, *Isaiah 1-39*, 533–7.

¹⁵⁴ Isa 44:23-45:13. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 196–201. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 157–8.

¹⁵⁵ Isa 34:14-20. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 652, 668–71. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 37, 48.

¹⁵⁶ Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 652, 668–71. Tull, *Isaiah 1-39*, 533–7.

¹⁵⁷ Isa 31:1. C.f. 31:1-9. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 407–410.

Isaiah's other example of faithfulness is in the Servant Songs.¹⁵⁸ There is controversy over who the Servant refers to.¹⁵⁹ However, whether he is Isaiah, Israel, Jesus or a combination of all three, this Servant gives an example of a faithful response to God that Israel is called to emulate.¹⁶⁰ In his response, we also see God's enactment of justice:

¹ This is My Servant; [...] He will bring justice to the nations. ² He will not cry out or shout or make His voice heard in the streets. ³ He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not put out a smoldering wick; He will faithfully bring justice. (Isa 42:1-3)

Justice comes from a man who does not fight back.¹⁶¹ The rest of the servant songs detail a man (or nation) who suffers for the salvation of many. His only weapons are his words.¹⁶² This is echoed in the examples of other prophets who responded against persecution with the proclamation of God's word.¹⁶³

In Isaiah, we see a continuation of the themes that we have already noted surrounding war: Firstly, all war lies under God's sovereign providence; he declared who would win or lose, and he demonstrated his power to protect his people without them lifting a sword. Secondly, all war in Isaiah is presented as an expression of God's judgment –

¹⁵⁸ Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 107–8.

¹⁵⁹ For detailed discussions, see Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study* (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1948). H. G. M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1998), 113–166.

¹⁶⁰ Williamson, *Variations on a Theme*, 140–4.

¹⁶¹ Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 110–12.

¹⁶² Isa 49:2; 50:4. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 323–4.

¹⁶³ E.g. 2 Kings 9; Jer 26:11-15

either against Israel or other nations. This judgment lay solely in the hands of God as he raised up foreign nations to do his bidding. There is no sign that he required or called his people to participate in it. The other expression of God's judgment is found in the Suffering Servant who brings justice through his words and his suffering. It is this form of judgment that Israel is called to participate in.¹⁶⁴ As O'Donovan concludes, 'Israel has nothing to do with Cyrus. Its future life is [...] in obedience to Yhwh's prophet and following Yhwh's servant.'¹⁶⁵

The response that Isaiah calls for is clear: Israel is to remain faithful, and God will look after the 'big' things – the weather, the prosperity of the land, and safety from the surrounding nations. Israel's response to God's great providence is to trust his to care for them, to suffer the wrongs of this world with patient expectation of God's deliverance, and to proclaim his word.

3.7 The Latter Prophets

3.7.1 Living after the Exile

When Jerusalem fell, and Judah lost the last vestige of self-government, the biblical narrative of war entered a new phase. There are no more accounts of war, nor calls to war, in the rest of the Old Testament.¹⁶⁶ Instead, the prophets begin to teach about what it means to be a faithful people living under the rule of un-believing authorities. In these books, we see the tension between the fact that these rulers are from God, and

¹⁶⁴ Williamson, *Variations on a Theme*, 140–4.

¹⁶⁵ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 45.

¹⁶⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (trans. Marva J. Dawn; 3rd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 128.

their authority over God's people is part of his providential plan, and the recognition that they are oppressive forces arrayed against God.

In Jeremiah, God does not just command Judah to recognise Nebuchadnezzar as his just punishment. He commands them to recognise him as their new ruler. The very fact that God was allowing Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Judah was proof that God wanted him to rule, and so they must obey.¹⁶⁷ Judah were not to fight back. They were not to defend themselves. If they did, God would turn the very weapons in their hands against them.¹⁶⁸ This is not a theology of pacifism *per se*, but of God's sovereign providence revealed in history. Jeremiah was demonstrating that, if God planned Judah to be defeated, then nothing they did could stop it. In his letter to the exiles in Babylon, Jeremiah directed them to not only accept Babylon's conquest, but to participate fully in their new society, praying for it and working for its good.¹⁶⁹ However, he also looked forward to the judgment of Babylon for its evil actions, and the restoration of Israel.¹⁷⁰

The Book of Daniel gives an example of what that participation might look like. Daniel and his friends worked willingly for the government, even though it stood condemned for its deeds.¹⁷¹ When ordered to do something that was against God's command, they refused to obey, but otherwise continued to respect the government's authority.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Jer 27:6-12. Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 59.

¹⁶⁸ Jer 21:4. Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 286–7.

¹⁶⁹ Jer 29:7. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 401–3, 410. Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 80–81.

¹⁷⁰ Jer 25:8-14; 50:1-51:64. Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 368. Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 373.

¹⁷¹ E.g. Dan 1:18-21. Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel* (Apollos old Testament Commentary; Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002), 58–9, 94–5.

¹⁷² Dan 1:8-20; 3:8-12; 6:12-13. Lucas, *Daniel*, 58–9, 94–5.

When punished wrongly, they did not rebel or fight back. Instead, they trusted God's providence, that he would save them – or not! – according to his will.¹⁷³ Their only form of 'attack' against their oppressive rulers was to proclaim God's judgement against them.¹⁷⁴ Daniel's apocalyptic visions give the theological foundations for this behaviour; Even as bestial nations trample the earth, God is pictured as being in complete control, even dictating the progression of nations throughout history.¹⁷⁵ It is this providential control that allows Daniel and his friends to submit to their rulers, in the sure knowledge that God is acting for their good.

The relationship to rulers that Daniel models on an individual level is reflected by Zechariah on the national level. Writing after the return from Exile, he considers the position of Yehud as a province within the Persian Empire. Chapters 1-6 are book-ended by the visions of the four horsemen and four chariots.¹⁷⁶ In the historical context, these visions declared that God was using Darius's forces to bring peace to the land.¹⁷⁷ The rest of the text gives the reason for this peace: that the Temple could be rebuilt.¹⁷⁸ Importantly, Zechariah does not call the people to participate in God's pacification of the world, but to praise him for it, and to return to their job of restoring correct worship in the land. In the heart of this section lies a message to Zerubbabel that sounds much like a rebuke: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD

¹⁷³ Dan 3:16-18. Andrew E. Hill, 'Daniel', in *Daniel - Malachi* (ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; The Expositor's Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 80-82.

¹⁷⁴ Dan 4:24-27; 5:18-28.

¹⁷⁵ Dan 2:1-49. Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 82.

¹⁷⁶ Zech 1:8-11; 6:1-8. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 181.

¹⁷⁷ Thomas E. McComiskey, 'Zechariah', in *The Minor Prophets* (ed. Thomas E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 1004-8, 1036, 1109-1110.

¹⁷⁸ McComiskey, 'Zechariah', 1018-19, 1039.

Almighty'.¹⁷⁹ The terms might (חֵיל) and power (כֹּחַ) are most often used as military terms.¹⁸⁰ Whether or not Zerubbabel had attempted (or considered) a military rebellion to gain freedom and advance God's plans, it is clear that God was rejecting the idea.¹⁸¹ He is declaring that he alone will take care of the international scene. Zerubbabel's job was to respond faithfully and rebuild the Temple.¹⁸² In isolation, Jeremiah's theology of submission to Babylon could be seen as simply acceptance of God's judgment.¹⁸³ However, Zechariah shows this same attitude continuing beyond the Exile and into the Return. This reveals a developing theology of God's use of the nations, rather than a one-off exigency.

The recognition that the authorities were God's servants did not bring the prophets to call for mindless obedience in all things. When the government commanded unfaithful acts, they were to be disobeyed. However, neither was there any scope to actively resist against the authorities if they are oppressive or evil. Rather, these prophets demonstrated a distinct refusal to fight. Instead, they looked to God for their salvation both in the present and the future.

3.7.2 Waiting for the Day of the Lord

Underlying the Prophets' theologies of providence is a powerful apocalyptic vision of history. This vision not only highlights God's control of the nations in the present, but

¹⁷⁹ Zech 4:6.

¹⁸⁰ Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8* (The Anchor Bible; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 269.

¹⁸¹ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, xxxix–xl.

¹⁸² Zech 4:8-10. McComiskey, 'Zechariah', 1088–90.

¹⁸³ Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 289. Hobbs, *A Time for War*, 225.

looks forward to his final display of sovereign power in ‘the Day of the Lord’, which is linked to military language.¹⁸⁴ The final chapters of Isaiah, in particular, look forward to when ‘the LORD will execute judgment on all flesh with His fiery sword, and many will be slain by the LORD.’¹⁸⁵ The result of God’s judgment is that ‘violence will never again be heard of in your land; devastation and destruction will be gone from your borders.’¹⁸⁶ Daniel’s vision of chapter 7 connects this final judgment with the defeat of God’s enemies and coming of the Son of Man.¹⁸⁷ At the same time, Isaiah was waiting for God’s Servant to bring justice through his suffering.¹⁸⁸ Zechariah’s apocalyptic chapters look towards a great battle where a re-united Israel’s enemies would be defeated once and for all.¹⁸⁹ This eschatological victory is linked to the coming of God’s king, who would shatter the spear and bring peace to the nations.¹⁹⁰ However, even while the Israelites are described as great warriors, it is clear that God will win the battle for them.¹⁹¹

In the Day of the Lord, we see the final uniting of the themes of war, providence and judgment. It was to be the end of all war, and the beginning of an eternal peace. It was also clearly a day of judgment – the faithful remnant of God’s people would be vindicated and their enemies condemned. Finally, it was to be brought about by God

¹⁸⁴ Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 69–70.

¹⁸⁵ Isa 66:16. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 685.

¹⁸⁶ Isa 60:18. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 557.

¹⁸⁷ Dan 7:1-14. Lucas, *Daniel*, 183–7. Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 63–69.

¹⁸⁸ Isa 42:1-3. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66*, 110–12.

¹⁸⁹ Zech 9:13-16; 14:3-9. McComiskey, ‘Zechariah’, 1229–34.

¹⁹⁰ Zech 9:9-10. McComiskey, ‘Zechariah’, 1166–8.

¹⁹¹ Zech 9:13-16; 10:4-12; 12:8-9; 14:3-9, 12-13. McComiskey, ‘Zechariah’, 1230–1. Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England: IVP, 2003), 127.

and God alone. This apocalyptic vision takes the concept of war and judgment of the nations out of the hands of God's people, and leaves it entirely in the hands of God.

3.8 Summary

As we have seen, the actual wars of the Old Testament do not give licence for future wars; the war of a conquest held a very specific place in salvation history and it was the only war Israel was ever commanded to participate in. This war was not an end in itself, but existed to achieve the possession of the Promised Land. Victory in these wars, like the possession of the land, was dependent on Israel's faithfulness to God. In the same way, they were entirely won or lost according to God's will and through his sovereign providence. These observations give us important information for considering two of the questions which we are asking about O'Donovan's argument:

3.8.1 War and Judgment

The people of Israel were given a strong framework for enacting judgment amongst themselves. However, no such framework was provided for enacting judgment on their neighbours. Quite the opposite, Israel was specifically prohibited from engaging in war with neighbours of theirs who were not part of God's initial command of conquest.

Though the conquest was, in part, an enactment of God's justice, Israel only took part because God commanded them to. The rest of the history of the Old Testament shows that God enacted his judgment on other nations without any involvement from his people – raising one nation to punish another. This did not make the invading nations'

actions good, or justify the wars that they waged. Rather, God was using the evil actions of people to enact his good purposes.

3.8.2 War and Providence

Israel understood God's providential actions in bringing judgment to the nations. However, this understanding did not result in a theology of Israel participating in this judgment. Instead, the Old Testament reveals a developing theology of leaving the nations to God's providence, and focussing on individual and national faithfulness.

3.8.3 Conclusion

These observations are not unique. Similar conclusions been advanced by a number of scholars as a result of sustained Old Testament analysis.¹⁹² These conclusions suggest that a faithful reader of the Old Testament, waiting for the Messiah, would not find themselves called to enact God's justice on the surrounding nations – or even their own occupiers. Instead, the pattern of the Old Testament is to live lives of faithfulness and justice, and trust God's sovereignty to care for them, judge the nations, and bring about his final justice on the Day of the Lord.

¹⁹² Craigie, *Problem of War*, 93–112. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior*, 156 ff. Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 47, 60, 71. Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 134–149.

3.9 Appendix – All the Battles of the Bible

As part of the biblical theology, what follows is a table detailing every battle described in the Old Testament. To further the examination of the role that these wars have played in the salvation story, this table outlines some important details about each battle:

Result (colour):

Battles that were won by God's people are highlighted in green. Battles that were lost are highlighted in red. For completeness, this table also includes battles that were fought between Israelites. These battles are highlighted in purple. The battle described in 2 Kings 8:28-29 (2 Chronicles 22:5-8) has no specified result, so is left white.

Palestinian opponents:

As demonstrated in section 3.3, God's commands for war were about possession of the Promised Land. For each battle in this table, there is a tick if the enemy was an inhabitant of Palestine, and a cross if they were from further afield.

God's involvement:

In most of the battles, there is an explicit statement about God's involvement. These have been grouped into the following categories:

Gave victory	The narrative explicitly states that God won the victory for Israel.
Strategic guidance	God gives specific commands about how to prosecute the battle.
Direct command	God commands Israel to fight that specific battle
Miracle	The narrative describes a miraculous intervention by God to achieve victory
Cycle	Narrative cycles which involve a cycle of Israel forsaking God, God handing Israel over to an enemy, Israel returning to God and then God acting to rescue them. In all these cycles, God's agency is clearly described in raising the enemies and then rescuing his people. The majority of these cycles occur in the book of Judges.
Punishment	A lost battle which the narrative declares to be God's punishment or a result of a previous sin.

Passage	Palestinian Opponents	God's involvement	Comments
The Patriarchs			
Gen 14:1-20	✓	Gave Victory	Abraham rescues Lot. Tithes to Melchizedek
Gen 34	✓		Vengeance for Dinah's rape. Jacob angry.
Exodus and Conquest			
Ex 17:8-15	✓	Miracle	Moses' arms raised
Num 14:39-45 (Deut 1:41-46)	✓	Punishment	Commanded not to fight
Num 21:1-3	✓	Gave victory	
Num 21:21-35 (Deut 3:1-6)	✓	Gave victory	
Num 31:1-8	✓	Direct command	
Josh 6	✓	Strategic guidance Miracle	
Josh 7:1-12	✓	Punishment	
Josh 8:1-24	✓	Direct command Strategic guidance	
Josh 10:1-13	✓	Miracle	The sun stands still
Josh 10:28-43	✓	Gave victory	
Josh 11:1-23	✓	Gave victory	
Judges 1:1-5	✓	Gave victory	
Judges 1:8-2:3	✓	Gave victory	Failed to drive the nations out
Judges			
Judges 3:8-10	✓	Cycle	Othniel
Judges 3:12-30	✓	Cycle	Ehud
Judges 3:31	✓		Shamgar
Judges 4	✓	Cycle	Deborah & Jael
Judges 6-7	✓	Cycle	Gideon
Judges 9:22-57	✓	Gave victory	
Judges 10-11	✓	Cycle	Jephthah
Judges 12:1-6			
Judges 13	✓	Cycle	Samson

Judges 18	✓		Ambiguous event with an ambiguous priest.
Judges 20		Strategic guidance	
Judges 21			
1Sam 4:1-11	✓	Punishment	Lost ark
1Sam 7:3-11	✓	Miracle	
Saul's reign			
1Sam 11:1-11	✓	Miracle	
1Sam 13-14	✓	Miracle	
1Sam 14:47-48	✓		
1Sam 15	✓	Direct command	
1Sam 17	✓	Gave victory (Miracle?)	David and Goliath
1Sam 18:1-19:8	✓	Gave victory	
1Sam 23:1-5	✓	Direct command	
1Sam 27	✓		David's raids while amongst Philistines
1Sam 30	✓	Direct command	
1Sam 28-29, 31 1Chr 10:1-14	✓	Punishment	Saul killed
David's Reign			
1Chr 11-12	✓	Gave victory	
2Sam 2-4			
2Sam 5:6-10	✓	Gave victory	
2Sam 5:17-20	✓	Direct command	
2Sam 5:22-25 1Chr 14:9-17	✓	Tactical guidance	
2Sam 8:1-14 1Chr 18	✓	Gave victory	
2Sam 10 1Chr 19-20	✓		
2Sam 11-12	✓		Bathsheba
2Sam 13-18		Gave victory (Punishment?)	
2Sam 20			

2Sam 21:15-22	✓		
The later monarchy			
1Kgs 11-12 2Chr 11		Punishment God prevents war	Kingdom splits
1Kgs 14 2Chr 12:1-12	✗	Punishment	Judah becomes vassal of Egypt
2Chr 13		Gave victory	
2Chr 14:10-14	✗	Miracle	Cushite force invaded, Asa prayed and Cushites fled without a battle.
1Kgs 15 2Chr 16			
1Kgs 20	✓	Gave victory	
1Kgs 22 2Chr 18	✓	Punishment	
2Kgs 3	✓	Miracle	
2Chr 20	✓	Miracle	
2Kgs 6	✓	Strategic guidance Miracle	
2Kgs 6:24-7:16	✓	Miracle	
2Kgs 8:20-22 2Chr 21:4-10	✓	Punishment	
2Kgs 8:28-29 2Chr 22:5-8	✓	Punishment	Israel's king wounded. Judah's king's 'downfall'.
2Kgs 9-10 2Chr 22:8-11	✓	Gave victory	
2Kgs 10:32-33	✓	Gave victory (Punishment?)	
2Kgs 13:1-5	✓	Gave victory	
2Chr 24:23-24	✓	Punishment	
2Kings 14:7	✓		
2Chr 25:5-13	✓	Strategic guidance	
2Kgs 14:8-14 2Chr 25:17-24			
2Kgs 14:25-27	✓	Gave victory	
2Chr 26:6-8	✓	Gave victory	
2Kgs 15:16	✓		

2Kgs 15:19-20	✘		Israel becomes vassal of Assyria
2Kgs 15:29	✘		
Post 722 BC			
2Chr 27:2-6	✓	Gave victory	
2Kgs 16:5-6 2Chr 28:5	✓	Gave victory	Judah asks Assyria for help, and swears allegiance.
2Chr 28:5-13		Gave victory	
2Chr 28:17-19	✓	Punishment	
2Kgs 17:3-23	✘	Punishment	
2Kgs 18:8	✓	Gave victory	
2Kgs 18-19 2Chr 32 Isa 36-37	✘	Miracle	Sennacherib's failed siege of Jerusalem
2Chr 33:9-13	✘	Punishment	
2Kgs 23:29 2Chr 35:20-24	✘	Punishment	Josiah killed
2Kgs 24:1 2Chr 36:608	✘		Judah becomes vassal of Babylon
2Kgs 24:2-4	✘	Punishment	
2Kgs 24:7-20	✘	Punishment	First exile.
2Kgs 25 2Chr 36:16-21	✘	Punishment	Second exile.

4 War in the New Testament

We have already noted that references to war ceased in the Old Testament after the Exile. The only discussions of war were looking towards God's victory in the final day. Similarly, there are no actual wars in the New Testament, nor discussions of how they fit into a Christian ethic. However, the language of war is used throughout the New Testament, and the themes that we have identified in the Old Testament – providence and judgment – continue to be developed.¹⁹³ As with all biblical-theological themes, these themes that were true of Israel are first and foremost fulfilled in the person of Jesus.¹⁹⁴ It is only through him, through our unity with him, that these themes are then continued through the church.¹⁹⁵

In this chapter, we shall see that the New Testament continues the teaching that God is in control of this world, and that judgment lies in his hands. This understanding works out in Christians refusing to judge non-Christians, instead trusting them to God's judgment. We will also see that participation in God's providential rule is properly expressed through prayer and proclamation, not war. Finally, we will examine Romans 13, and similar passages, and conclude that they do not provide a conclusive argument that Christians should participate in the state's God-given role of judgment. We will conclude that, though there might be valid arguments for Christians engaging in war, they do not include judgment or providence.

¹⁹³ Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 18.

¹⁹⁴ Graham Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centred Hermeneutics* (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2006), 246 ff. Michael Hill, 'Biblical Theology and Ethics', in *Interpreting God's Plan: Biblical Theology and the Pastor* (ed. Richard Gibson J.; London: Paternoster, 1998), 96.

¹⁹⁵ Hill, 'Biblical Theology and Ethics', 96, 105.

4.1 The Final War

The only physical war that is referred to in the New Testament is the fall of Jerusalem, which Jesus predicts in all three Synoptics.¹⁹⁶ There is great difficulty in discerning what parts of these discourses are referring to the fall of the city, which point to the Cross, and which refer to an eschatological future.¹⁹⁷ However, it is clear that Jesus is describing the siege primarily as an act of God's *judgment* against a Jerusalem who has rejected her Messiah.¹⁹⁸ Jesus intermingles this prediction with a discussion of the Day of the Lord which the prophets were awaiting. In doing so, he takes the focus away from the temporal disaster and uses it as a sign that points towards the greater cataclysm.¹⁹⁹ This final Day is also presented as an act of judgment where those who have rejected God and his Messiah are punished, and those who follow him are vindicated.²⁰⁰

The Book of Revelation looks towards that Day in military terms, picturing Jesus as a triumphant warrior on a white horse leading a great army.²⁰¹ This is quickly followed by the defeat of Satan and his forces, which God wins decisively through direct

¹⁹⁶ Matt 23:33-24:31; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-28.

¹⁹⁷ Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross From a Distance* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 2004), 90–92. Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 289–292. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 683–5.

¹⁹⁸ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 304. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 683. John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 986.

¹⁹⁹¹⁹⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 683–5. Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 124–6.

²⁰⁰ Matt 25:31-46. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 746–7.

²⁰¹ Rev 19:11-16. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 948 ff. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 679 ff.

intervention.²⁰² This picture draws upon the apocalyptic visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah, revealing that this is the battle that they were looking towards.²⁰³ While the prophets were looking towards the political defeat of their enemies, Revelation shows that the true enemy is Satan himself. The connection between war and judgment is continued with this final victory being immediately followed by the Day of Judgment.²⁰⁴ The final war will also be the final declaration of God's judgment.

While Jesus' eschatological speech pointed his disciples forward to the final Day of the Lord, it also pointed them to the Cross.²⁰⁵ The victory that will be consummated on the last day was won in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. As such, the final war has already been fought and won.²⁰⁶ Revelation also describes Christ's work as a victory already achieved.²⁰⁷ O'Donovan emphasises that this victory is over both the spiritual and earthly political powers, and Christ's rule is 'exercised over the whole world.'²⁰⁸ O'Donovan's main point is that this rule is expressed in two ways. Firstly, government is now 'thrust back' to 'a single function', which is judgment.²⁰⁹ Secondly, the rest of Christ's rule is expressed in the Church.²¹⁰ This understanding is vital for our theology of judgment. However, this victory also has great significance for a theology of war.

²⁰² Rev 19:17-20:10. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (2nd ed.; The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 356, 373.

²⁰³ Mounce, *Revelation*, 373. Osborne, *Revelation*, 711–12. Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R), 174–5.

²⁰⁴ Rev 20:11-15. Beale, *Revelation*, 1031–3. Osborne, *Revelation*, 669–70.

²⁰⁵ Bolt, *The Cross From a Distance*, 90–92.

²⁰⁶ Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 180–3.

²⁰⁷ Rev 5:6-14; 12:1-17. Beale, *Revelation*, 623–4.

²⁰⁸ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 146.

²⁰⁹ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 156–7.

²¹⁰ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 155–7.

4.2 The End of Holy War

When God commanded Israel to war, the primary reason was to inhabit and purify the land. This was part of the promises made to Abraham, and the establishment of the temporal Kingdom of Israel. This human kingdom was a prefiguring of the eternal Kingdom that Jesus brought about – a Kingdom without borders, united in Christ through the Spirit.²¹¹ With this shift from physical to Spiritual kingdom, the primary Old Testament motivation for war has been removed.²¹² Longman concludes that '[t]he purpose and dynamic of sacred warfare in the Bible indicate that this theme cannot be used to justify war between nations today'.²¹³ Cameron agrees that 'the Bible's story arc makes it clear that Christians are not to engage in "holy war"'.²¹⁴

4.3 Spiritual warfare

It would be more accurate to say that holy war is continued in the New Testament, but not with physical weaponry; 'For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.'²¹⁵ Paul refers to the Christian life as a spiritual war multiple times.²¹⁶ In Ephesians 6, his most detailed exposition, he lists the armour for this war as truth, righteousness, readiness and faith, and the only weapon is the

²¹¹ Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 110–18.

²¹² Craigie, *Problem of War*, 99–100. Andrew J. B. Cameron, *Joined Up Life* (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2011), 131–2.

²¹³ Longman, 'Warfare', 839.

²¹⁴ Cameron, *Joined Up Life*, 132.

²¹⁵ Eph 6:12. Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 824–6.

²¹⁶ Eph 6:12; 2 Cor 10:3; 1 Timothy 1:18. Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 165–71.

sword of the word of God.²¹⁷ Hebrews and Revelation also call the word of God a sword, suggesting that this re-purposing of holy war language was a common part of early Christian teaching.²¹⁸ The pervasiveness of this imagery, along with the absence of discussions of actual physical war, leads Longman to conclude that, '[f]or God's people, spiritual warfare has replaced physical'.²¹⁹ Whether or not this replacement is complete, it is clear that the theological role of warfare in the Old Testament is predominantly absorbed by in the New Testament by Christ's victory and the Christian's spiritual war against Satan.

4.4 Judge Not

In the New Testament, the theme of judgment predominantly refers to God's final judgment on the Day of the Lord.²²⁰ However God's judgment is not limited to the future; there are a number of instances of temporal judgment, including Annaias and Saphira, Herod, and some of the Christians in Corinth.²²¹ The New Testament does not present immediate judgment as the norm for God, but these events demonstrate that God stands willing and able to execute his judgment as he sees fit. In this section, we shall see that, as a result of this understanding, the New Testament directs Christians not to participate in the judgment of non-Christians, but to leave it in the hands God.

²¹⁷ Eph 6:10-17. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 819 ff. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 455–60.

²¹⁸ Heb 4:12; Rev 1:16; 2:16; 19:15. Osborne, *Revelation*, 92–3. Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 174–7.

²¹⁹ Longman, 'Warfare', 839.

²²⁰ J. D. Douglas and Bruce A. Milne, eds., 'Judgment', in *New Bible Dictionary* (3rd ed.; Leicester, England: IVP, 1996), 631–2.

²²¹ Acts 5:1-11; 12:23; 1 Cor 11:30. David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 208, 211, 368–70. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 556.

The complexity of the issue of judgment is revealed in Jesus' command 'do not judge' which appears in two Gospels.²²² In Matthew, this command is followed by a discourse on hypocritical judgment, and might be best translated 'judge unfairly'.²²³ In Luke, however, it is placed in the context of *love of enemies*, and suggests a non-judgmental forgiveness of those who have hurt us.²²⁴ The Matthean usage seems to apply to relationships within the community of God, while the Lukan seems more directed towards responses to persecution from outsiders.²²⁵

The Matthean passage cannot be read as a blanket ban on all forms of judgment, since, in chapter 18, Jesus gives his followers a framework for judging each other.²²⁶ Indeed, Paul encourages them to do so rather than taking their grievances to secular courts.²²⁷ However, this judgment is not violent or coercive. Rather, as Hill points out, '[e]xclusion from the community of faith is the only form of external constraint prescribed in the NT.'²²⁸ Paul offers a demonstration of this in 1 Corinthians 5, where he calls for the excommunication of a sexually sinful man, which he then develops into a general guideline.²²⁹

²²² Matt 7:1; Luke 6:37.

²²³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 167–9.

²²⁴ John Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 303–4.

²²⁵ Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, 293, 300–301.

²²⁶ Matt 18:15-22. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 531–4.

²²⁷ 1 Cor 6:1-6.

²²⁸ Hill, 'Biblical Theology and Ethics', 106.

²²⁹ 1 Cor 5:1-13. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 164–181. Ciampa and Rosner, *1 Corinthians*, 216–9.

Later in that same passage, Paul specifies that he does not include judgment of non-Christians: 'For what is it to me to judge outsiders? [...] But God judges outsiders.'²³⁰ In Romans 12, he expands this general position to include those who persecute Christians: 'do not avenge yourselves'.²³¹ The foundation of this command is a quote from Deuteronomy 32: 'Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says the Lord'.²³² The word for vengeance (ἐκδικέω, ἐκδίκησις) does not connote the personal retaliation that is implied in English, but 'to procure justice for someone' or 'to inflict appropriate penalty for wrong done'.²³³ Paul is telling Christians not to seek to enact justice on outsiders.²³⁴ This passage reinforces the Lukan command, against judgment of outsiders, by emphasising the certainty that God will judge them.²³⁵ This, however, does not preclude the Christian from proclaiming the gospel, which is in itself participating in God's judgment of the nations.²³⁶

It is true that Christians will eventually be involved in the judgment of the world.²³⁷ However, until then, every teaching about judgment in the New Testament takes

²³⁰ 1 Cor 5:12-13. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 190–1. Ciampa and Rosner, *1 Corinthians*, 219–20.

²³¹ Rom 12:19. C.f. Rom 12:14, 17.

²³² Deut 32:35, 36; Rom 12:19. Mark A. Seifrid, 'Romans', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 680–1.

²³³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (ed. William F Arndt and Frederick W Danker; 3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 300–1.

²³⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 755–6. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 672–4.

²³⁵ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 755–6. Schreiner, *Romans*, 673–6.

²³⁶ Rom 2:16. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 103–7.

²³⁷ Matt 19:28; Luke 22:29-30; 1 Cor 6:2-4. Ciampa and Rosner, *1 Corinthians*, 227–9. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 564–5.

coercive judgment out of the hands of Christians.²³⁸ Christians are not called to judge outsiders, and their judgments of each other can only go as far as excommunication.

This conclusion is not contested by O'Donovan. He agrees that '[b]y embracing the final judgement of God Christians have accepted that they have no need for penultimate judgements to defend their rights.'²³⁹ Instead, the church 'must witness to divine judgement by no judgement, avoiding litigation and swallowing conflict in forgiveness.'²⁴⁰ However, O'Donovan argues that participation in a state's role of judgment, as a participation in God's providential rule through the state, is 'a carefully circumscribed and specially privileged exception to a general prohibition of judgment'.²⁴¹ We will now turn to consider the role of Christians in providence and judgment.

4.5 Providence and Prayer

As we have seen, God's sovereign providence is a major theme, not just of war, but of the Old Testament as a whole. As a nation, Israel were called to trust that God was acting for their good, and to respond in faithful obedience. Jesus continued this theme at an individual level, teaching that God's control over his world extends down to the tiniest detail, even providing for and sustaining the sparrows, the ravens and the wildflowers.²⁴² This control is a foundation for faith; since God loves his people much

²³⁸ Mark A. Seifrid, 'Judgment', in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 623.

²³⁹ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 151.

²⁴⁰ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 259.

²⁴¹ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 99.

²⁴² Matt 6:25-26, 33-34; 10:29-31. C.f. Luke 12:16-34.

more than birds and flowers, he will certainly care for them. Therefore, his people need not worry about the future – even tomorrow – but instead can focus on seeking the Kingdom. The primary attitude that Jesus is addressing is *anxiety* (μεριμνάω), which is ‘a failure to trust God as provider’.²⁴³ In the context of sending the disciples out to an itinerant ministry, Jesus is assuring them that God will care for them as they focus on living for his kingdom.²⁴⁴ This echoes assurances which we have seen in the Old Testament, especially Zechariah. Paul also emphasised God’s providence, both attributing events in his life to God’s control, and reminding his readers that ‘all things work together for the good of those who love God’.²⁴⁵

In his teaching on God’s providence, Jesus does not then call for his followers to bring about God’s work. Quite the opposite, he calls for them not to worry about those things, to trust God and not to worry. At the same time that he taught about God’s providential care, Jesus also taught his followers to *pray*.²⁴⁶ Both Jesus and the epistles teach us that prayer is powerful, because it is heard by the God who rules the universe, who loves us and who answers prayer.²⁴⁷ Echoing Jesus, Paul writes that Christians should not worry, but commit everything to God in prayer.²⁴⁸ John’s reminder to pray within God’s will, and Paul’s teaching of the Spirit’s help in prayer, demonstrate that

²⁴³ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 310. C.f. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 166–7.

²⁴⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 33–34. Nolland, *Matthew*, 314–15.

²⁴⁵ Rom 8:28. C.f. Rom 15:22; 2 Cor 7:5-6. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 481.

²⁴⁶ Matt 7:7-11; Luke 11:11-13. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 278–80. Nolland, *Matthew*, 325.

²⁴⁷ Matt 21:21-22; Jas 5:13–18; 1 John 5:14-15. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 430–1. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1994), 662–4.

²⁴⁸ Phil 4:6. G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Apollos, 2009), 289–91.

prayer is a means of being part of God's plans and purposes.²⁴⁹ We pray according to God's will, and God enacts his will through us.²⁵⁰ Thus, prayer is the correct, and most powerful, way of participating in God's providence.²⁵¹

4.6 Christians and the State

However, as we have seen, O'Donovan argues that 'the sphere of public judgment constitutes a carefully circumscribed and specially privileged exception to a general prohibition of judgment.'²⁵² His primary text for this assertion is Romans 13:1-7.²⁵³ In this section, we shall examine this and similar texts, and shall see that O'Donovan's interpretation is not the only plausible reading of the text. Indeed, we shall consider another reading that sees a demarcation between the role of the Christian and the State.

4.7 Romans 13

Romans 13 comes in the middle of a larger section, chapters 12-15, in which Paul moves to considering the impact that the gospel has on the life of the Christian.²⁵⁴ Verses 1-2 lay the basis for Christian living, and set the tone for the rest of chapters 12-15.²⁵⁵ As chapter 12 continues, we see a stark contrast to the role of government that

²⁴⁹ 1 John 5:14-15; Rom 8:26-7. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 477-8. Stephen Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 281-3.

²⁵⁰ E. P. Clowney, 'Prayer, Theology of', in *New Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright; Leicester, England: IVP, 1988), 526. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 662-4.

²⁵¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 430-1.

²⁵² O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 99.

²⁵³ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 147-9.

²⁵⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 744 ff.

²⁵⁵ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 706. Schreiner, *Romans*, 677.

is presented in Rom 13. Where Christians are commanded away from vengeance (μη [...] ἐκδικοῦντες, 12:19), government is described as an avenger (ἐκδικος, 13:4). Where Christians are not to repay evil for evil (12:17), governments bring wrath on the one who does wrong (13:3-4). As Bruce observes: ‘The state is thus charged with a function which has been explicitly forbidden to the Christian’.²⁵⁶ This tension, and the seemingly positive description of government in chapter 13 is what supports O’Donovan’s position on Christians participating in government.²⁵⁷

The framework of Romans 13:1-7 consists of three imperative verbs directed to the readers: ὑποτασέσθω (‘submit’, v1), ποιεί (‘do [good]’ v3), and ἀπόδοτε (‘pay’, v7). In addition, the phrase ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι in verse 5 acts as a fourth command.²⁵⁸ All but the last of these commands are followed by various explanatory clauses – most introduced by γάρ – giving reasons for them. All of these explanatory clauses are descriptive, and all but one are predicates. The subject that they are describing is identified variously as ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις (v1), ἐξουσία (v1, 2, 3) and ἄρχοντες (v3). The structure of the passage clearly shows that these terms all refer to the same subject. Though Paul’s use of ἐξουσία is frequently referencing spiritual powers, the parallel use of ἄρχοντες indicates that this passage is discussing government and political authorities.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Nottingham, England: IVP, 1985), 236.

²⁵⁷ O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 147–9.

²⁵⁸ C.f. Schreiner, *Romans*, 679.

²⁵⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 9-16* (International Critical Commentary; London: T&T Clark, 1979), 656–8. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 760. Moo, *Romans*, 795–8.

The repeated structure of imperative followed by explanatory indicatives shows that Paul's main intention is to give his instructions, and his descriptions are provided as supporting information. Twice, the readers are commanded to submit (ὑποτάσσω) to the government (v1, 5). They are also commanded to do good, in order to gain its approval (v3) and to pay all their obligations, including taxes (v7, c.f. v6). The verb ὑποτάσσω is used some thirty times in the NT, and describes relationships with church leaders, husbands and slave masters.²⁶⁰ Significantly, Paul uses it to describe a relationship of mutual-submission in Ephesians 5:21.²⁶¹ It is important to note that there is a distinction between submission and obedience.²⁶² Moo defines ὑποτάσσω as 'to recognize one's subordinate place in a hierarchy, to acknowledge as a general rule that certain people or institutions have "authority" over us.'²⁶³ Witherington argues that the passive voice emphasises the 'voluntary or self-impelled nature of the submission.'²⁶⁴ In the context of the ancient demands for total obedience to rulers, this language is notable for its moderation.²⁶⁵ This is particularly pertinent when considering the possibility of the authorities' commands conflicting with the commands of God. Submission to authorities 'is limited to respecting them, obeying them so far as such obedience does not conflict with God's laws, and seriously and responsibly disobeying

²⁶⁰ 1 Cor 16:16; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 2:18.

²⁶¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 716–20.

²⁶² Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 760–2.

²⁶³ Moo, *Romans*, 797.

²⁶⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 312. C.f. Charles H. Talbert, *Romans* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 296.

²⁶⁵ Witherington, *Romans*, 307.

them when it does'.²⁶⁶ We have already seen this demonstrated in the lives of Daniel, Elijah, Jesus and the disciples.

These imperatives help us understand why Paul wrote this passage to the Roman Christians. A process of 'mirror-reading' suggests that there was uncertainty within the Roman church about its relationship to the government.²⁶⁷ The exact nature of the issue revolves around our understanding of verses 6-7. Dunn considers these verses to be the climax of the passage, meaning that the main concern in Rome revolved around whether Christians should pay taxes.²⁶⁸ He notes the many taxation pressures in 1st century Rome which were generating resistance amongst the general population and could well have influenced the church.²⁶⁹ On the other hand, Moo argues that v6 implies that the Christians are already paying taxes, which would make their uncertainty about authority more general. He suggests that Paul is writing against an extreme understanding of the new creation that would result in the rejection of all worldly authorities.²⁷⁰ Unfortunately, there is no clear exegetical reason to prefer one option over the other. Clearly, however, Paul is writing to a church that is reluctant or uncertain about submitting to the government authorities, and he is writing to counter that disposition.

²⁶⁶ Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 662.

²⁶⁷ Regarding mirror-reading, see: John M. G. Barclay, 'Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*/31 (1987): 73-93.

²⁶⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 766 .C.f. Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 115-41.

²⁶⁹ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 766.

²⁷⁰ Moo, *Romans*, 791.

With this in mind, we can examine the indicative statements that Paul uses to support his commands. The core of these descriptive passages are four predicate clauses, which describe the authorities as: ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμένοι (v1), θεοῦ [...] διάκονός (twice in v4) and λειτουργοὶ [...] θεοῦ (v6). The verb τάσσω means ‘to bring about an order of things by arranging’.²⁷¹ The heightened proximity of the perfect τεταγμένοι emphasises God’s ordering, and might even imply *forceful* ordering, so that authority serves God ‘consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly’.²⁷² Paul is painting a picture of God authoritatively placing the authorities where he wants them. This is further emphasised by Paul’s double reference to them as being God’s διάκονος. BDAG offers various meanings of διάκονος, including ‘assistant’, ‘agent’ and ‘intermediary’.²⁷³ In both occurrences in verse 4, the word order places the emphasis on the fact that it is God whom the authorities are serving.²⁷⁴ Dunn notes that there is ‘no indication of a sacral or cultic reference’, so ‘minister’ would be the wrong translation.²⁷⁵ Nor does λειτουργός hold any religious connotation in this context. Though Paul does use the term in a liturgical sense in Romans 15:16, the most common usage means ‘public servant’ or ‘official’.²⁷⁶ The key theme of these descriptions is the subordinate position that the authorities inhabit in service to God. It is God who places them there, and he uses them for his purposes.

²⁷¹ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 991.

²⁷² Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 119–20. Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, 665.

²⁷³ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 230–1.

²⁷⁴ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 764.

²⁷⁵ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 764.

²⁷⁶ Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, 668–9. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 766.

Those purposes are expanded on in the more detailed descriptions of this passage. Government is a terror to those who do wrong (v3), and an avenger that brings wrath upon them (v4). At the same time, it approves those who do good (v3). O'Donovan is not alone, nor unjustified, in concluding that Paul is describing the proper role for government under the reign of Christ.²⁷⁷ Clearly, Paul sees the proper role of government to be the distinguishing between the good and the wrong, and rewarding them as they deserve.

The other description of the authorities in this passage is μάχαιραν φορεῖ – 'bearing the sword'. Commentators are divided about this phrase, and much of it depends on structural decisions. As noted earlier, Moo sees verses 6-7 as part of a bigger exhortation, and so argues that the sword is 'generally [...] the right of the government to punish those who violate its laws.'²⁷⁸ On the other hand, Dunn considers verses 6-7 to be the climax of the passage and the main purpose of the exhortation. In this vein, Furnish argues that the bearing of the sword is *only* referring to enforcing tax collection, and does not extend to any other forms of judgment.²⁷⁹ Though Dunn does not go as far as Furnish, both he and Witherington recognise the importance of the taxation issue in Paul's instructions.²⁸⁰ Morris and Boice both emphasise the *internal* nature of the

²⁷⁷ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 147–9, 152. C.f. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 770–2. Schreiner, *Romans*, 683–5.

²⁷⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 802.

²⁷⁹ Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul*, 115–41.

²⁸⁰ Witherington, *Romans*, 314.

judgment that Paul is discussing, which suggests that Paul is speaking of policing, not war.²⁸¹

This exegetical examination raises some important issues that challenge O'Donovan's reading of Romans 13:

Firstly, it is difficult to determine exactly what forms of activity Paul is discussing when he refers to 'the sword'. It is possible that he was only talking about force used in tax collection and enforcement. Most likely, he was referring to the generic role of government in enforcing their laws within their borders. It is, however, very unlikely that Paul had the role of war in mind, since he was specifically writing for Christians to obey the government of the land in which they lived.

Secondly, the imperative-indicative structure of this passage indicates that the indicatives are subordinate to the imperatives. That is, his descriptions of government are there to support his commands. This passage 'is not a dogmatic treatise on the government and the State, but a demand for loyal conduct'.²⁸² We cannot expect Paul to have laid down all the issues involved in considering what the state is, and how Christians are to participate in it, because '[i]t was simply not his intention to detail here the full relationship of believers to the government.'²⁸³ The indicative-imperative pattern shows that Paul is simply giving the information that we need to consider the questions

²⁸¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (vol. 4; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 1655–60. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 464.

²⁸² Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament: A Complete and Up-To-Date Guide to the New Testament Universe and Its Historical Setting* (trans. G. Buswell; Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), 100.

²⁸³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 688.

of whether or not a Christian should *submit* to government. Thus we cannot draw definitive conclusions about *participation* in a government's role of judgment.²⁸⁴ The underlying conclusions about government that we can discern beneath Romans 13 are true, but not necessarily complete. To understand Paul's complete thinking on participation in the state, we need to read more widely, including Romans 12.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the language of *servant* (διάκονός, λειτουργός) and *ordering* (τάσσω) is not unambiguously positive. As our biblical theology has indicated, God frequently expresses his sovereign control over the world by directing the actions of evil people to achieve his good purposes. In Isaiah, we have seen that this does not necessarily convey any form of approval. There is a strong parallel between the description that Paul gives of the government and the way that God has used the nations surrounding Israel throughout her history. This is particularly clear in Jeremiah's description of Nebuchadnezzar:

⁶ So now I have placed all these lands under the authority of My servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. I have even given him the wild animals to serve him. ⁷ All nations will serve him [...] ¹² Put your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, serve him and his people, and live! (Jer 27:6-7, 12)

²⁸⁴ C.f. Bruce, *Romans*, 236.

Twice more in Jeremiah, God calls Nebuchadnezzar ‘my servant’.²⁸⁵ This is in recognition of the fact that *all* authority is given by God – not just the authorities that follow an ideal.²⁸⁶

4.7.1 Mark 12 and 1 Peter 2

Before drawing some conclusions, we will briefly turn to two other passages that address the role of the state; Mark 12 and 1 Peter 2.

In Mark 12:14-17 (and its parallel passages in Matthew 22:15-22 and Luke 20:20-26), the language of giving (ἀποδίδωμι) is the same as in Romans 13:7, and has similar implications to the submission language.²⁸⁷ The dual reference to Caesar and God could be interpreted to be describing separate spheres of authority – one where Caesar’s rule is supreme, and one where God’s rule is.²⁸⁸ However, it is much more likely that Jesus is subordinating the limited demands of Caesar under those of God; ‘We must render to God our very selves in obedience and service, which will in time touch all we have and own. Caesar can have his paltry tax’.²⁸⁹

For this paper, the critical question is whether coercive force in support of judgment is one of these things that are ‘of Caesar’ (τὰ Καίσαρος, v17). While some commentators

²⁸⁵ Jer 25:9; 43:10.

²⁸⁶ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 770. Moo, *Romans*, p801 n51. Vic Reasoner, *Romans* (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan, 2002), 525–6, 528.

²⁸⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-25:53* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1613. William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 424–5.

²⁸⁸ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 248.

²⁸⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 636.

generalise this passage to cover ‘the commands of the king’,²⁹⁰ there is no textual warrant to make such a conclusion.²⁹¹ Rather, the only clear conclusion we can make is that money and taxes are clearly under the authority of government. In addition, the question needs to be asked: what does ‘rendering to Caesar’ mean in regards to judgment? It could mean participating with Caesar, or it could mean letting Caesar have it, and instead focussing on the things of God. There is no exegetical reason for taking either interpretation over the other. This passage records a very brief answer from Jesus regarding a specific question, which was asked to trap him. As such, it does not add any more detail to the question of participating in government’s role of judgment.

1 Peter 2:11-17 bears many strong resemblances to Rom 13:1-7, and many of the same observations can be made. Firstly, the structure of the passage is similar in that it consists of a main imperative (ὑποτάγητε, v13) followed by descriptions that support the command.²⁹² Secondly, the command is exactly the same – to ‘submit’ (ὑποτάσσω) to the authorities. The same observations can be made about the difference between submit and obey or participate.²⁹³ These are made even clearer since this passage is followed directly by Peter’s commands to submit to slave masters and husbands.²⁹⁴ Thirdly, the descriptions of the authorities have a very similar tone to

²⁹⁰ E.g. J. Duncan M. Derret, ‘Render to Caesar ...’, in *Law in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970), 335 ff.

²⁹¹ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 636.

²⁹² J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 122–3.

²⁹³ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 176–7. I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991), 83–4.

²⁹⁴ 1 Pet 2:18, 3:1. Marshall, *1 Peter*, 83–4.

Romans 13; the Emperor is ‘the supreme authority’ (v13) and government officials are ‘sent out by God to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good’ (v14). We also see the same emphasis that it is *God* who has raised up the government to do this task.²⁹⁵ Finally, outside of this passage, Peter espouses the same ethic of non-vengeance that Paul does, even to the point of echoing Paul’s command to not repay evil for evil.²⁹⁶

Thus we can draw similar conclusions to those from Romans 13; Firstly, this description of government is not written to inform a doctrine of Christian participation in the role of government, but to encourage the readers to submit to the ones that God is *currently* using to enact his judgment.²⁹⁷ Secondly, the descriptions of government in this passage share the same the parallels with God’s Old Testament actions. The fact that God is using them does not equate to a declaration that they are good. The positive descriptions of government’s role in judgment are not written to encourage Christians to *participate* in it, but to *submit* to it.

4.7.2 An Alternative Reading of Romans 13

These observations allow us to make an alternative interpretation of Romans 13, one which has already been advanced by scholars such as Craigie, Witherington and

²⁹⁵ Michaels, *1 Peter*, 125–6.

²⁹⁶ 1 Pet 3:9. Marshall, *1 Peter*, 108–9. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 177–9.

²⁹⁷ John H. Elliot, *1 Peter* (The Anchor Bible; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 501–2.

Volf.²⁹⁸ Paul has just instructed his readers to renounce revenge and to respond to evil with good. Moo outlines Pauls logic:

[Rom 12] might lead one to think that God was letting evildoers have their way in this world. Not so, says Paul in 13:1-7: for God, through governing authorities, is even now inflicting wrath on evildoers.²⁹⁹

That is, God is using the government of Rome in the same way that he used Assyria, Babylon and Persia in their day.

We have previously noted that the imperatives are the key to understanding Romans 13. The Old Testament context helps us see that Paul is commanding his readers to submit to authorities *for the very reason* that they are performing a role in God's world that Christians are not to be part of. The intention of this passage is not to describe what the state is supposed to do, but how a Christian is to live out the gospel under the state – regardless of what the state does.³⁰⁰ Thus, Paul is not stating an alternative context where judgment is to be considered differently. Rather, he is talking about how God is maintaining his justice, and what the proper Christian response to this is. As Volf concludes, the New Testament proclaims God's monopoly on judgment: 'Christians are not to take up their swords [...] but to take up their crosses and follow the crucified Messiah.'³⁰¹ Thus we can see Romans 13 as a continuation of the programmatic

²⁹⁸ Craigie, *Problem of War*, 107–111. Witherington, *Romans*, 318–324. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 290–306.

²⁹⁹ Moo, *Romans*, 792.

³⁰⁰ Marxsen, *Introduction*, 100.

³⁰¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 302.

command in Romans 12:2 to 'not be conformed to this age'. The worldly authorities fill the role of vengeance – and even in that, God's providence means that they are (willingly or unwillingly) his servants. But Christians are not to conform to that pattern.

The practical ethical result of this passage is that Christians can continue to meet evil with good (Romans 12:20-21), in certain faith that God is dealing with the greater issue of judgment. In fact, as Volf argues, the non-vengeance in Romans 12 'requires a belief in divine vengeance'.³⁰² Christians can abstain from judgment only because they know that God will judge and is judging.

The purpose of this section is not to *prove* this alternative interpretation, but to demonstrate that it is an exegetically valid alternative to O'Donovan's. Given the biblical-theological evidence we have examined, it would seem that the initial position for a Christian would be the non-judgment of outsiders taught by Jesus and the Apostles. Thus, the burden of proof lies upon any theological position that would suggest an exception to this pattern of living. While O'Donovan's masterful biblical theology clearly shows the role of judgment in the hands of the government, he has fallen short of proving that the Christian is expected, or even permitted, to be part of that process. As we have seen, it is possible to interpret Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2, and Mark 12 to suggest this conclusion. However it is by no means the only valid understanding of those passages within their context. Therefore, the burden of proof still resides with O'Donovan to demonstrate that Christians are to act differently under the aegis of government.

³⁰² Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 304.

5 War as Judgment?

At the beginning of this paper, we asked three questions of O'Donovan's theology of just war:

Is war 'an extraordinary extension of ordinary acts of judgment' in which Christians are called by God to participate?³⁰³

Does the fact that God is working providentially through war constitute a command, or license, to engage in war?

Is the governmental role of judgment 'a carefully circumscribed and specially privileged exception to a general prohibition of judgment'?³⁰⁴

5.1 The Christian and the State

The last question is the hardest to answer definitively. In our consideration of Romans 13, and the related texts, we have seen that O'Donovan's position is not the only valid interpretation of the texts within their context. We have considered an alternative reading that recognises God's use of the state for enacting judgment. This then frees up Christians to live out the command 'do not judge' in faith that God had judgment under control. It is impossible to categorically demonstrate which reading was intended by Paul. However, given that O'Donovan concedes that Christians are not to judge, we

³⁰³ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 6.

³⁰⁴ O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment*, 99.

suggest that there would have to be a much stronger *biblical* argument presented before Christians could step into the role of judgment.³⁰⁵

5.2 War and Providence

Such support cannot be derived easily from a theology of providence. O'Donovan's argument implies that God calls Christians to participate in his providential execution of judgment on the nations by participating in just war. However, as we have seen from our biblical theology, the united testimony of the Bible is that God's providential control of the world means that his people do not have to enact his judgment of the nations. Quite the opposite, God calls his people to trust his providential care, and to instead focus on being faithful. This faithfulness includes obedience to the New Testament's call not to judge non-Christians.

5.3 War and Judgment

Finally, even if we accept some argument that allows Christians to participate in the government's role of *judgment*, this still does not translate into *war*. The biblical theology that we examined demonstrates that war held a specific function in the possession of the land that was intimately linked to faith. While God gave generic patterns of judgment within the land of Israel, he did not give any such indication that Israel were to enact his judgment outside of their borders. Though the conquest was an act of God's judgment, it was a one-off event, and not a licence for Israel to initiate other such acts of judgment against other nations. Rather, God continually showed his

³⁰⁵ O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 218, 259.

capability and intention to enact judgment against nations through the actions of other nations. Thus, while it is plausible to argue that Christians should engage in the state's role of judgment, it cannot be argued that such a participation extends to judging other nations through war. Instead, Christians are to leave the judgment of the other nations to God's providence.

5.4 Conclusion

While we have not conclusively demonstrated that Christians should not engage in war, we have raised serious questions about O'Donovan's use of providence and judgment to justify it. While there are other possible arguments for just war – loving the neighbour, for example – it remains with O'Donovan to present a more conclusive biblical argument that Christians are called to participate in God's providential act of judgment, and that the call to judgment extends to war against another nation.

6 For Further Thought

This paper is not a comprehensive demolition of all just war theories, in particular we have not considered the concept of loving the oppressed by fighting against the oppressor. Nor is this a complete theology of Christian pacifism. However, the observations that we have made in our biblical theology can allow us to draw some initial conclusions that may assist further consideration of the issue.

6.1 War Is Not Evil

Firstly, it is important to note that we are not saying that war is inherently evil. Some forms of liberal pacifism take this route, and then have difficulty reconciling their theology with God's use of war and violence, even extending to judgment and the Cross.³⁰⁶ Rather, the biblical understanding of war is that it is the exclusive domain of God, and those to whom he delegates it. The biblical theology that we have examined suggests that Christians are not delegated the role of war by God. Rather, he chooses to use the warlike tendencies of the nations to enact his temporal justice.

6.2 Governments are Not Evil

Contrary to Yoder's theology of authorities, the governmental role of judgment-as-war does not make them inherently evil.³⁰⁷ While it is clear that Christians should not participate in war, it would be wrong to conclude that Christians could therefore not

³⁰⁶ Craigie, *Problem of War*, 10–12. C.f. Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 173–4. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 212–27.

³⁰⁷ John Howard Yoder, 'Following Christ as a Form of Political Responsibility', in *Discipleship As Political Responsibility* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2003), 60. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 203–4.

participate or support any part of government that implicitly supports such actions. For example, taxes provide material support for government's wars. However, Christians are clearly commanded to pay them.³⁰⁸ Somewhere between the extremes of engaging in war and not paying taxes lies the level of involvement appropriate for Christians, and it will be different in different circumstances. Daniel's example might be of value: he worked hard to serve an empire that stood condemned for its deeds.³⁰⁹ The line he drew was refusing to perform an act that *directly* contravened God's laws.

6.3 Pacifism is Not 'Doing Nothing'

Within a discussion of war, it is vital to keep a strong theology of God's providence, which we have seen prominently throughout our biblical theology. A Christian's refusal to participate in war is not the same as letting evil roam the earth unpunished. Indeed, the Old Testament wars, and Romans 13, highlight the fact that God will use the nations to achieve his judgment. O'Donovan is right that a Christian must not do *nothing* when faced with evil, and to emphasise participation in God's providence.³¹⁰ His error is in assuming that participation involves enacting the judgment ourselves. Instead, the biblical model for participation in God's providence is *prayer*. As we have considered, *prayer is powerful*. We have been promised that God hears our prayers, and that they are effective.³¹¹ When faced with evil nations, the correct response is to pray for God's intervention and his justice.

³⁰⁸ Matt 22:15-22; Mark 12:14-17; Luke 20:20-26; Rom 13:1-7. See discussions above.

³⁰⁹ E.g. Dan 1:18-21. Lucas, *Daniel*, 58-9, 94-5.

³¹⁰ O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*, 8.

³¹¹ Matt 21:21-22; Jas 5:16-18; 1 John 5:14-15. Clowney, 'Prayer, Theology of'.

The other faithful response that we are given in the face of evil is preaching God's word. We are constantly reminded that God's proclaimed word has the power to convert and to judge.³¹² In the face of evil, the Bible directs us to respond in prayer, proclamation, and faith in God's providence. This response is not 'doing nothing'. Far from it, it is engaging the most powerful forces in the universe. Compared to prayer and proclamation, mere military might is foolishness.

6.4 Calling for justice

Apart from praying and proclaiming the Word, is a Christian to remain mute in the face of evil throughout the world? Though it is an Old Testament example, Psalm 139 gives us a valuable insight. Written in the aftermath of the Exile, there should have been no doubt in the minds of the Judean prisoners that they deserved the judgment that God had enacted upon them through Babylon. However, that did not stop them crying out for justice and judgment against their oppressors. Indeed, they pronounced blessings upon the future force who would devastate Babylon – which turned out to be the Persians. This psalm introduces some important observations. Firstly, while recognising God's actions in history, Christians can deplore the methods used in war, and they can speak out against them. Whether it is speaking out against a dictator, or against the military methods used to topple him, Christians have the right to challenge governments on their use of war. Secondly, Christians can cry out for justice, even though that means that God might answer that cry by raising one nation to judge another. If war were inherently evil, then this would be hypocritical. However, because

³¹² John 12:48; Rom 2:16; Heb 4:12; Rev 1:16.

war is the exclusive preserve of God, it is not hypocritical to cry out to the one who rules the universe for justice. Thirdly, while Christians cannot see God's justice in world events, we can know that he is working *all* things for the good of his people, and thank him for the glimpses of justice that we do see. Finally, like the Saints of Revelation 6, we await God's final revelation of his judgment, crying out 'how long, O Lord?'³¹³

A king is not saved by a large army;
a warrior will not be delivered by great strength.
The horse is a false hope for safety;
it provides no escape by its great power.

Now the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him;
those who depend on His faithful love.
(Psalm 33:16-17)

Therefore, we may boldly say:
The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?
(Hebrews 13:6)

³¹³ Rev 6:9-11.

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